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Book Reviews

The Virus and the Vaccine by Debbie Bookchin and Jim Schumacher, New York, St. Martin's Press, 2004.

Dr. Herbert Ratner was one of the most illustrious members of the Catholic Medical Association, having served as its president in 1977. He was a charismatic and influential teacher in the Department of Public Health at Loyola University School of Medicine while, at the same time, serving as Director of Public Health in Oak Park, Illinois, west of Chicago. In that capacity, he was called upon to approve the use of Salk polio vaccine for the immunization of school children in Oak Park. He felt that the process for the development of the vaccine did not guarantee that it would be free of viral contamination. While his community was protesting loudly that their children were being denied protection from a dread disease by a highly publicized and effective vaccine, Dr. Ratner was vindicated by the occurrence of polio cases caused by the vaccine, particularly that manufactured by Cutter Laboratories. Later, Dr. Ratner was one of the first to call attention to the fact that Simian virus 40 also contaminated the vaccine, containing virus grown on monkey kidneys.

Forty years later Dr. Michael Carbone, working at the NIH in a laboratory studying oncogenes, discovered that SV40, when injected into hamsters, caused mesotheliomas. Dr. Carbone, presently also working at Loyola Medical School, was able, with other scientists around the world, to demonstrate that SV40 was showing up in a variety of human lung, brain, and lymphatic cancers in adults. Between 1954 and 1963 almost 100 million Americans had received polio vaccinations with a vaccine contaminated with this same carcinogenic monkey virus. This fascinating book, *The Virus and the Vaccine* traces the growing body of evidence that the SV40 virus introduced into human subjects by a huge experiment of nature through a contaminated vaccine has the potential to continue to function over time as a slow growing oncogenic virus.

This began a years – long odyssey by Dr. Carbone to study the role of SV40 in the causation of human tumors. Other investigators using the polymerase chain reaction technique were able to detect traces of viral DNA in tumors. When Bergsogel and Garseo at the Farber Institute were able to detect SV40 DNA in tumors, they were accused of contaminating their material. Skeptics came up with many theories as to explain away the SV40 that in appearing in human cancers in denial of its source having been the polio vaccine.

Carbone had tried for a number of years to find old vials of vaccine. He wanted to use PCR to see if they contained SV40 and, if so, what type.

But how could he get his hands on archival vaccine? Carbone first approached the FDA. The agency responded that it no longer had vials dating back to the contamination era in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the early 1990's, coincident with the new round of SV40 research that Carbone and others had begun, a decision had apparently been made at FDA to discard the old lots of vaccine. Carbone next wrote to every one of the six manufacturers who had produced the Salk vaccine in the late 1950s and 1960s. None had vials for him to test; they had discarded their old stock years, even decades, ago. Where could Carbone find the vaccine to test? Stumped, he decided to call on Herbert Ratner, an elderly doctor he had met while attending the 1997 SV40 conference in Bethesda. Ratner had served as the public health officer during the 1950s in—of all places—Oak Park, Illinois, the very community in which Carbone resided. Ratner had been hoping to hear from the young Italian scientist who had impressed him at the 1997 conference; he had something very special to give him.

Within a week of April 12, 1955 announcement of the success of the Salk field trials, cases of Parke, Davis vaccine had arrived at Ratner's offices in Oak Park. Ratner was supposed to start inoculating local school children immediately as a part of the National Foundation's free immunization campaign. But Ratner was the rare public health official of 1955 that was not eager to distribute the newly licensed Salk vaccine. He was concerned that the Salk inactivation process was inadequate, and he was also concerned about viral contaminants. Ratner refused to administer the vaccine. Parents were angry, and Ratner was practically run out of town. Then the Cutter incident broke, and Ratner suddenly appeared to be very perspicacious. After the Cutter incident had blown over, Ratner remained suspicious of the vaccine. Instead of injecting the young children of Oak Park with the vials he deemed unsafe, he stored them away in his refrigerator, where they remained, unopened, for more than forty years. The eighty-seven-year-old Ratner offered them to Carbone to test. "I would have gone all the way to Alaska to find this stuff, and here it was three miles away," Carbone says, holding a tiny vial of vintage vaccine between his gloved thumb and forefinger.

Carbone and Rizzo used PCR to test Ratner's vials in the summer of 1999. Their first discovery was that the 1955 Parke-Davis vaccine did indeed contain SV40, but it was a variant of the simian virus that virologists refer to as slow-growing, because it replicates at a much slower rate rather than most SV40 strains used in laboratories. Carbone's discovery was significant because it marked the first time such an SV40 variant had been recovered from polio vaccine. Earlier, researchers, including Sweet and Hilleman, had only found fast-growing SV40 when they had searched contaminated vaccines. Both kinds of SV40 occur in

human tumors, but until Carbone tested the Parke - Davis vaccine, there was no proof that the slow-growing SV40 found in humans had come from polio vaccine. Carbone's finding debunked claims that the virus the researchers were finding in human tumors came from another source. Even if some small amount of exposure to SV40 was due to monkey bites, SV40 researchers now widely agree that there is no question that the vast exposure of millions of Americans to the monkey virus occurred through contaminated vaccines. "This proves that the SV40 that was present in the polio vaccine is identical to the SV40 we are finding in these human tumors," Carbone says of his finding.

The Virus and the Vaccine is a meticulously researched and powerfully written account. The Salk vaccine and its roles in wiping out one of mankind's most dreaded diseases may ironically have contributed to a new threat to the health of millions.

Needless to say, the possibility has inspired extensive political maneuvering among numerous national health agencies reluctant to admit that their triumphal medical achievement of the 1950s may prove to have a serious downside.

Reviewed by :

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George Pell by Tess Livingstone, Duffy and Snellgrove, Potts Point, N.S.W., Australia, \$22.00.

This is the first biography of George Pell, Archbishop of Sydney. It is a book about strong leadership, and about the dangers strong leaders face today if they espouse unfashionable views.

In recent decades a war has been waged within the Catholic Church between traditionalists and those who want to drain its teachings and institutions of much of their meaning. This is the story of that struggle, told through the life of a leading combatant, George Pell, who has spent much of his adult life battling attempts to, in his words, "trivialise Jesus Christ".

Tess Livingstone is the editor of the opinion page at the *Courier Mail* in Brisbane. She is an experienced journalist who has worked in London, Canberra and Brisbane. For this book she visited many parts of Victoria, Sydney, Oxford and Rome, and interviewed over fifty people, including many of Pell's opponents.

George Pell was born in Ballarat and was signed to play Australian Rules football for Richmond. Despite this and his academic success, he